

An angry full house of poker players descended on Capitol Hill Tuesday to protest the federal crackdown that abruptly closed down three of the leading Internet poker sites in April.

"We're deeply concerned about losing our rights," said former New York Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, the chairman of the Poker Player's Alliance, a nonprofit group that helped organize the rally outside the Capitol. "It's about rights of what you can do in your own home on your own time."

The protest comes just over a month after FBI agents seized three major online poker websites - Full Tilt, PokerStars and Cereus - and charged 11 executives with bank fraud, operating illegal gambling businesses and money laundering.

Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. said the crackdown was meant to put new teeth into a 2006 bill meant to regulate online gambling and the estimated \$6 billion industry that has grown up with the online poker boom. The Poker Player's Alliance and other poker groups say online poker is a "right" and the government should work to regulate it instead of trying to prohibit it completely.

Mr. D'Amato said the gathering was an attempt to put a face to the 10 million online poker players in America. He said the best course would be for Congress to not only make online poker legal, but also to regulate it strictly.

"We believe in proper rules and regulations, and for them to be followed," said Mr. D'Amato.

Linda Johnson, a professional poker player, said the government move had been disastrous for her both financially and personally.

"It's not just a loss of a source of income. It's my hobby, my passion," Ms. Johnson said. "I travel over 200 days of the year, and at night in my hotel room I love to play online poker. And I often play it at home. How can they prohibit a game you can play in your own home?"

GOP Reps. Joe Barton of Texas and **John Campbell of California**, who are currently pushing parallel pieces of legislation to clarify the laws allowing online poker, joined the protesters Tuesday. Mr. Barton argued that poker should be legal because it is a game of skill, not a game of chance.

"When we had the indictments a month or so ago, people in my district were affected greatly," he said.

Over 50 protesters were in attendance, urging lawmakers Congress to go all in on legalizing online poker. Daniel Alexander, a protester from New York, showed off a sign reading, "Ease The Debt, Let Us Bet!"

"Poker could be an outlet for taxation. Tax and regulation could help ease the U.S. debt crisis a great deal," Mr. Alexander said.

Eric Prag, the D.C. state director for PPA, agreed.

"[The goal is] regulation and licensing," Mr. Prag said. "The government is in dire need of funds and this could provide a steady revenue stream. And [poker] is fun! It's something fun that the government can earn money off of."

**Mr. Campbell** said the recent crackdowns would merely push online poker underground or to foreign-based sites.

**"It's about consumer protection. When people play on foreign sites ... you don't know what's going on. We need to protect that consumer, protect that player, protect that person," Mr. Campbell said.**